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Goethe's "Faust"

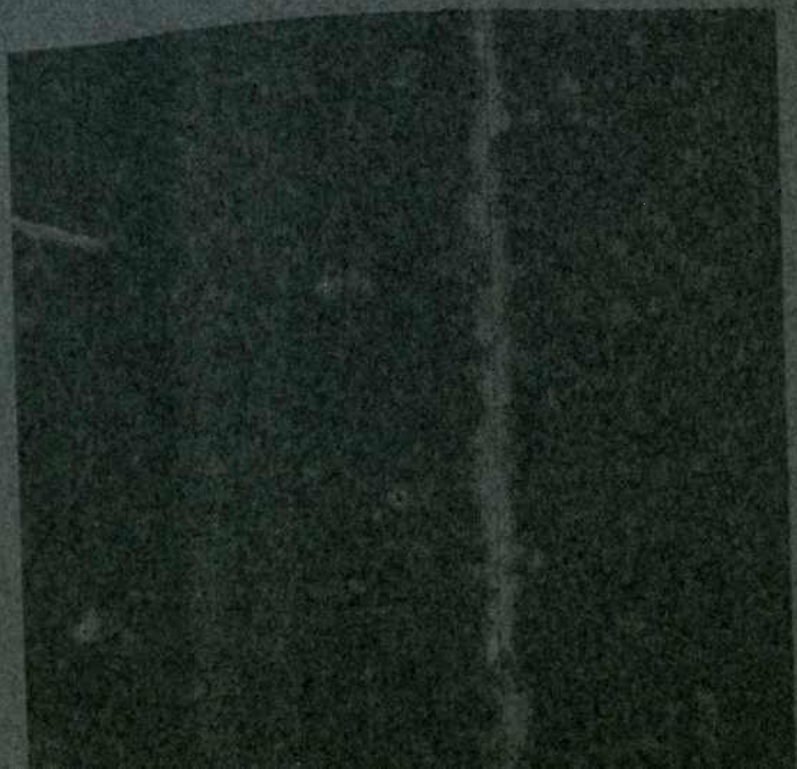
The Plan and Purpose of the Completed Work

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GOETHE'S "FAUST."

GOETHE'S "FAUST:" THE PLAN AND PURPOSE
OF THE COMPLETED WORK.*

BEING a giant among works of poetry, Goethe's "Faust" suffers the fate of almost all things gigantic, be they the work of nature or of human genius. Many men of note have admitted that the first impression which they received from the reading of "Faust" did not entirely come up to their expectations. But have we not all heard of similar comments on St. Peter's in Rome, on Beethoven's symphonies, on Raphael's Sistine Madonna, on Mont Blanc, or on Niagara? There are objects that transcend our powers of immediate comprehension and require a more gradual process of familiarization. Besides, it is a well-established fact that we generally approach such objects of universal admiration with unduly exaggerated expectations. As the best music demands repeated hearings before it admits us to an intimate appreciation of its subtlest charms, so also must the greatest works of literature be read again and again, and more in a reverential than in a purely critical spirit, before they reveal to us their innermost beauty and meaning. But whereas a work of average, or even more than average, rank may hardly sus-

*This paper, as its form and tone occasionally show, was originally prepared as an address, and as such was first delivered in November, 1898, before the Old Oak Club, of Nashville, Tenn. All learned references to critical and expository Faust literature have been purposely omitted, and it has been the author's chief aim to set forth what he considers to be the general plan and purpose of the poem as a whole. In so doing he has had in mind, primarily, that vast majority of thoughtful and competent readers who have to confine their study to the final form given by Goethe to his "Faust" drama, without being able or willing to trace in detail the various changes of plan and stages of execution through which this unique work of the world's literature had to pass before appearing "in vollendeter Gestalt."

tain our interest on a second or third perusal, the truly great work will become the more attractive the more we grow familiar with it. Thus it is with Goethe's "Faust."

In this statement the great majority of the serious-minded readers of "Faust" will probably concur, even if with certain individual modifications and reservations, if we are willing to confine what has been said to the First Part. If, however, you are not prepared to admit the same, or nearly the same, for the Second Part, those who are the most ardent students of "Faust" will tell you it is because you have not read it often enough. This much is true, many critics of sound taste and judgment, especially in more recent years, have claimed that the long-maligned Second Part of Goethe's "Faust" has gradually acquired for them a charm and significance not only equaling but even surpassing that of the First Part, which all admire. As for myself, I have not exactly reached this point yet, and hardly know whether I am traveling on any very direct road leading to it; but so much is sure: careful and repeated reading has filled me with a growing admiration, not to say a growing sense of awe, of the gigantic sweep and vast scope of the poet's *plan* and *purpose* in the Second Part, even though, in my present estimation, the artistic *execution* of this plan is often unsatisfactory, perhaps must needs be unsatisfactory, since the very design seems to transcend the boundaries of dramatic art, if not of all art.

Goethe, as is well known, was but a youth of about twenty years when the legend of the magician Faust, with which in his childhood he had become familiar through the chapbooks and the then popular puppet plays, began to interest him as a promising subject for poetic treatment. We can surmise that the earliest scenes were committed to writing about the year 1773, and we know that when Goethe, in 1775, went to Weimar, he took with him a manuscript containing the greater portion of the so-called First Part. Actually begun, then, at the age of about twenty-four, the work was not completed till seven months before the poet's death, at the age of eighty-three. It will be shown later that we have more than

one reason to regret this exceedingly slow process of development. On the other hand, we should not overlook the fact that the long years which elapsed between the first conception and the final completion of the work allowed the poet to incorporate in it the best experience of an unusually long and wonderfully rich life. The impetuosity of exuberant youth, the self-centered strength of mature manhood, the resigned wisdom of old age—all have combined to shape Goethe's "*Faust*," which, in the fullest sense of the word, deserves to be called the poet's life work.

But, while Goethe worked on his "*Faust*" at widely different periods of his life, with long intervals of inactivity in between, he did not delay the publication of the work till the time of its final completion. Yielding to the requests of interested friends who knew of his treatment of the subject, he repeatedly published different portions of it in a more or less fragmentary condition. Thus, in 1790, briefly after his return from Italy, where his interest in the "*Faust*" had been renewed, he published "*Faust, Ein Fragment*." Eighteen years later, in 1808, the First Part appeared in its entirety. Then, along the years 1827-28, some detached portions of the Second Part were published, especially the so-called *Helena* episode, which now forms the third act of the Second Part. The complete Second Part did not appear in print till after the poet's death.

On account of this disrupted mode of composition and publication, as well as on account of the unmistakable differences in tone and spirit which characterize different portions of the work, it has been commonly assumed that the drama as a whole, however sublime in thought and sentiment, however fascinating and powerful in its individual scenes, lacks unity of plan and purpose. Great stress, in this connection, has again and again been laid on a few evident incongruities that are found in the narration of some events and in the delineation of one or two of the characters. These, however, affect only details, without touching any vital point in the poet's unity of purpose. On the other hand, it should be well understood that if I am inclined to claim for "*Faust*" unity of

plan, I do not claim for it unity of action in the technical sense in which the term is applied to the drama. There can be no doubt that Goethe's "Faust" neither is nor was meant to be a regular drama, but rather a vast epic built on dramatic lines.

Instead of one action or conflict, which is gradually intensified, reaches a climax, and then speeds on to its final catastrophe, instead of one such action, as in an ordinary drama, we have in "Faust" a succession of apparently disconnected episodes, of which at least two (the Gretchen tragedy in the First Part, and the Helena episode in the Second Part) attain to the scope and importance of well-nigh complete dramas within the drama. With the exception of Faust and Mephistopheles, the persons figuring in one episode rarely reappear in another, and certainly Faust and Mephistopheles are the only characters that figure in the entire drama from beginning to end. It might thus appear as if the individuality of Faust alone was forming the connecting link between the various episodes, between which there would thus exist not an artistically organic connection, but merely a personal or biographical bond.

Such, however, is not the case. All of the episodes are organic parts of one consistent theme; they are not loosely connected through the figure of Faust, but form consecutive stages in the development of a higher action or conflict, which is not, and cannot be, directly represented on the stage, but which embraces all the various episodes in one supreme unity of purpose. This real unity of the drama is found in the conflict between God and Mephistopheles for the possession of Faust's soul. That is to say, the question which the drama tries to solve, and to which everything in it is made subordinate, is the question whether the forces that we consider antagonistic to the divine side of human nature are strong enough so to ensnare a soul so richly endowed as that of Faust as to make it hopelessly forget its divine calling and idealistic cravings. This conflict is clearly outlined in the prologue in heaven, where,

when the Lord speaks of Faust as his "servant," Mephistopheles sneeringly replies:

Forsooth! he serves you after strange devices:
No earthly meat or drink the fool suffices:
His spirit's ferment far aspireth;
Half conscious of his frenzied, crazed unrest,
The fairest stars from heaven he requireth,
From earth the highest raptures and the best,
And all the Near and Far that he desireth
Fails to subdue the tumult of his breast.

THE LORD.

Though still confused his service unto Me,
I soon shall lead him to a clearer morning.
Sees not the gardener, even while buds his tree,
Both flower and fruit the future years adorning?

MEPHISTOPHELES.

What will you bet? There's still a chance to gain him,
If unto me full leave you give,
Gently upon *my* road to train him!

THE LORD.

As long as he on earth shall live,
I make no prohibition;
While Man's desires and aspirations stir,
He cannot help but err.*

When, thereupon, Mephistopheles expresses his confidence in his ultimate victory, he is interrupted by the following words:

THE LORD.

Enough! What thou hast asked is granted.
Turn off this spirit from his fountain head;
To trap him, let thy snares be planted,
And him, with thee, be downward led;
Then stand abashed, when thou art forced to say,
A good man, through obscurest aspiration,
Has still an instinct of the one true way.

*The quotations are from Bayard Taylor's translation.

With other words, Mephistopheles is promised not to be interfered with in his plans for Faust's spiritual ruin, while, at the same time, we receive the indirect assurance that Faust, though he will not be preserved from error and sin, will ultimately remain victorious.

Thus we have in Faust an essentially dramatic conflict, only with this marked difference from the ordinary drama, that the conflict is a spiritual one, and that, hence, the two antagonistic powers cannot be directly represented as *dramatis personæ*. It is true, the anti-divine principle appears personified in the figure of Mephistopheles, one of the most marvelous creations of a poet's imagination, utterly fanciful and yet strikingly realistic, as interesting and fascinating as he is repellent and terrible. The divine element, however, the poet was unable to represent similarly. It appears confined to Faust's own soul, as the voice of his conscience, his better self.

After the character of the struggle that is to ensue has thus been indicated, the drama proper begins. The first scenes, answering the purpose of what we call the "exposition" of a drama, acquaint us with Faust's character, his past life, his present mood and surroundings. Here Faust appears as the very counterpart of Mephistopheles. The latter proves himself a mocking, unimpassioned spirit, of no mean intellectuality, it is true, but without a trace of idealism, a cold pessimist of low aims and unclean motives. Faust, on the other hand, is the heaven-daring Promethean idealist who is not willing to admit the reality of the intellectual limitations inherent in man's nature. He yearns for communion with the spirit world, for insight into the most secret fountains and subtlest processes of nature and of human life. His thirst for truth and experience are not to be quenched by the knowledge which he has been able to gather and the inadequacy of which he keenly feels. Neither creed and dogma on the one hand nor the results of philosophy and science on the other have satisfied him. He desires to fathom the universe, to know and to experience all things.

But, in considering this state of turmoil in Faust's soul, we must not overlook the fact that his error and waywardness are only relative. His striving after light and truth is indeed service of the deity, for it cannot be found or served except in light and truth. His error rather consists in the fact that in his ideal flights he not only forgets the serious limitations to which human nature is subject, but also neglects and scorns the manifold duties and pleasures resulting from our daily intercourse with our fellow-men—duties and pleasures which must, and in a large measure can, console us for so many yearnings that are doomed to remain unfulfilled. Thus Faust appears indeed as we found him depicted in the Prologue in heaven, a "servant of God," but one whose service is as yet confused and without clearness of vision, and who, therefore, has not yet found that supreme peace of soul that to Goethe means salvation.

In its last analysis, the conflict between Faust and Mephistopheles is a strictly human one. Both Faustian and Mephistophelian tendencies we all find in our own natures. Like Faust, we can say of ourselves:

Two souls, alas! reside within this breast,
And each withdraws from and repels its brother,
One with tenacious organs holds in love
And clinging lust the world in its embraces;
The others strongly sweeps, this dust above,
Into the high ancestral spaces.

Be it humiliating for our race or not, the fact remains that all men partake more or less of that coarser, disenchanting, coldly materialistic, frivolous nature that is the sphere of Mephistopheles. We are not planned as being of angelic purity. But it should be our constant endeavor to ennoble and purify the coarser elements within us by means of our higher instincts. This is rarely accomplished without a struggle, and this struggle, as has been shown above, is the principal theme of Goethe's "*Faust*."

Let us then proceed to a brief review of the development of this dramatic conflict.

Mephistopheles, we must imagine, has been hovering

around Faust like the hawk that is circling around the prey which it has spied in the fields. At last, when the opportunity seems favorable, he gains access to Faust's company, succeeds in interesting him in *his* way of looking at life, so diametrically opposed to that of Faust, and finally, when he finds his victim in an opportune mood of utter despair, ready to do anything that would seem to promise escape from the unbearable discontent gnawing at his soul, he proposes a pact, a written agreement signed with blood, through which Faust's soul is eventually to come into his possession.

I say "eventually," and thereby indicate the profound change which Goethe has introduced in this feature of the old legend. All other treatments of the Faust legend, it is true, contained a pact between Faust and the devil; but in all of them, and so also in Marlow's "Doctor Faustus," the pact was of such a nature that it required Mephistopheles to serve Faust in all of his desires for a fixed number of years, generally twenty-four, after the expiration of which period Faust's soul was to be the devil's. Such a mechanical device, permitting of no dramatic conflict and suspense, and making the ruin of a human soul dependent on the lapse of a fixed number of years, could not satisfy Goethe, nor indeed any truly modern poet.

The old pact was the natural result of a mediæval view of life, according to which every effort of man to get beyond the limits of traditionally sanctioned knowledge was a crime. According to it, every independent searcher after truth was a heretic and magician, and every heretic and magician in a league with the spirit of evil, speeding along the road to everlasting ruin. The eighteenth century, however, was pre-eminently characterized by the spirit of free inquiry. No longer was it held to be a sin, but rather man's highest aim and object in life, to search for the truth and to remove false traditions standing in the way of its light. To such an age Faust, tormented by his unsatisfied yearnings for profounder knowledge, could no longer be presented as an object lesson of timid moralizing, by means of which men should be impressed with the awful fate awaiting him who might dare to

move away from the traditional standards of knowledge, no matter how worn and void of truth they might happen to be. By such an age Faust's striving could no longer be considered as in itself sinful, but rather as the brightest light of the divine fire burning in man's soul. Irrevocably to commit him to the spirit of evil as punishment for this superhuman striving would have been nothing short of condemning the very spirit of progress and investigation that is the keynote of modern culture and civilization. Faust's error that was to bring suffering and wrongdoing into his life, as into that of others, was not his striving as such, but his excessive striving, that tried to disregard all limitations of human existence.

From such a point of view the pact between Faust and Mephistopheles could not remain the same as in the legend; in fact, in Goethe's conception it has become almost the very opposite. In the old legend, it was Faust's striving that condemned him; in Goethe's "*Faust*," the ultimate salvation of Faust is made dependent on his not ceasing to strive. If Mephistopheles succeeds, by the pleasures and activities which he is able to furnish, so to captivate Faust as to make him satisfied—*i. e.*, so to suppress his better nature that he will cease to strive after the highest things attainable to man—then, but not until then, is he to belong to Mephistopheles. No individual error will condemn Faust, nor, indeed, will any individual act save him; but everything will depend upon the spirit underlying his actions. Such is the Goethean form of the pact between the two.

FAUST.

When on an idler's bed I stretch myself in quiet,
There let at once my record end!
Canst thou with lying flattery rule me,
Until, self-pleased, myself I see—
Canst thou with rich enjoyment fool me,
Let that day be the last for me!
The bet I offer.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Done!

FAUST.

And heartily.

When thus I hail the moment flying:

"Ah, still delay, thou art so fair!"

Then bind me in thy bonds undying,

My final ruin then declare!

Then let the death-bell chime the token,

Then art thou from thy service free!

The clock may stop, the hand be broken,

Then Time be finished unto me.

Now the conflict between Mephistopheles and Faust's better self commences. Henceforth it is not only Mephistopheles's office to do Faust's bidding, but it is moreover incumbent upon him to choose those allurements through which he hopes to enslave his prospective victim. The various spheres of experience through which Faust now passes form the central portion of the entire drama, and allow us to distinguish five distinct stages: (1) the sphere of coarse revelry, represented by the drinking scene in Auerbach's "Keller;" (2) the sphere of womanly love, represented by the tragedy of Gretchen; (3) the sphere of restless but as yet rather purposeless activity in the circles of worldly power and social distinction, represented by the scene at the emperor's court in the first act in the Second Part; (4) the sphere of historical and æsthetic pursuits, represented by the classical Walpurgis Night and the Helena drama; (5) the sphere of practical usefulness, resting on ethical and unselfish motives, represented by Faust's noble effort to wrest land from the sea and to make it the abode of a free and happy people. After that follow the concluding scenes of the Second Part that depict the struggle of devilish and angelic hosts for Faust's soul, and its final entrance into heaven.

Even this brief enumeration of the five principal stages of the action—one might well call them the five acts of a vast dramatic composition—establishes, or at least suggests, one important fact. The spheres in which we encounter Faust and Mephistopheles represent an ascending scale, if judged from the standpoint of their intrinsic value to human life.

The first stage, the scene in Auerbach's "Keller," exhibits a wanton waste of human energy; while the last scene, by the seashore, represents one of the highest aims of human life: unceasing, well-defined activity aiming to produce, within the limits of what is feasible, the greatest possible good to multitudes of others. From this it further follows that, while at first the influence of Mephistopheles over Faust is increasing and leads the latter deeper and deeper into sin, with the beginning of the Second Part, however, Mephistopheles's influence commences to wane. He still must do Faust's bidding, but the latter more and more assumes the leadership, and suggests the aims of their joint activity.

Let us now examine somewhat more in detail the five principal stages, or episodes, of the drama, and in so doing, we shall especially try to determine in what spirit Faust enters upon each of these typical spheres of experience and in what spirit he again emerges from each of them. After the pact has been made, Mephistopheles, in answer to Faust's question, "Now, whither shall we go?" replies: "As best it pleases thee. The little world, and then the great, we'll see." This programme is strictly carried out. The first two episodes—the student's scene in the wine vault, as well as the entire Gretchen drama—constitute the experiences in the narrower world of personal relations; the last three—the scenes at court, the Helena drama, and the active life at the seashore—constitute the experiences of the broader world of activity in government, art and science, and cultural labor. Mephistopheles of course begins at the bottom round of the ladder. He would fain win Faust at the lowest price, with the least outlay of exertion on his part. He, therefore, first tries to lure him into a life of vulgar and soulless revelry. But it is characteristic that during the entire scene in Auerbach's "Keller" Faust remains a passive spectator. He speaks only twice, first, on joining the company, "Fair greeting, gentlemen!" and not very much later, "To leave them is my inclination." The first attempt of Mephistopheles has been a flat failure. Far from satisfying Faust, he has not even succeeded in interesting him.

His next scheme is more deeply laid. Faust's sensual nature, that has been utterly neglected in his previous life, is skillfully aroused by Mephistopheles in the scene in the witch's kitchen, so that when he first meets pure and lovely Gretchen, he, as Mephistopheles himself says,

talks like Jack Rake,
Who every flower for himself would take,
And fancies there are no favors more,
Nor honors, save for him, in store.

He brutally says:

And if that image of delight
Rest not within mine arms to-night,
At midnight is our contract broken.

Mephistopheles has a good chance for success this time. But his purpose is again to be foiled. According to his plan, Faust is henceforth to lead the life of a libertine, whom he will drag through dust and mire from one victim to another.

The Gretchen tragedy is undoubtedly not only the most powerful part of the Faust drama, but to the great majority of readers it even is the real center of interest, that which "Faust" first suggests and stands for. The exquisite delicacy of some of its opening scenes, as well as the terrible pathos of its final catastrophe, of which an English critic has said that its tragic intensity has never been paralleled and can never be exceeded, make it a complete drama in itself, the interest in which has induced the poet to develop it far beyond the proportions which it should have as only one of the episodes of the larger drama. The chief point of interest from our present point of view is the consummate skill with which the poet makes Gretchen's purity and loveliness transform Faust's libertinism into truly impassioned love, much to Mephistopheles's dismay, who again sees his prey slipping from his hand. This change of sentiment on the part of Faust does not save Gretchen, but, in a sense, it does save Faust, at least from immediate ruin. When Faust's true love for Gretchen awakens, he flees from her, for he sees

and knows that, with all his love for her and hers for him, he is utterly unable to procure her that happiness which she deserves. The chasm between the two is too great to be bridged over, even by love. Faust says of himself:

I am the fugitive, all houseless roaming,
The monster without aim or rest,
That like a cataract, down rocks and gorges foaming,
Leaps, maddened, into the abyss's breast!
And sidwards she, with young, unawakened senses,
Within her cabin on the Alpine field.

But Mephistopheles, who, in his blind eagerness, cannot give up his game as lost, succeeds again in lulling Faust's conscience to rest. Faust returns to Gretchen, and an awful vista of sin engendering sin opens before our eyes. Gretchen, all confidence and love, falls. Her mother dies from the effects of the sleeping draught administered to her. Gretchen's brother attacks his sister's lover, and, in the ensuing combat, is killed. Faust must flee to escape the hands of justice, while Gretchen, crazed with the awful consciousness of her sin, drowns her child and is cast into prison. These awful results of his first wrong plunge Faust deeper and deeper into sin, but at the same time reawaken his conscience and the determination to right his wrong as much as possible, even though it be at the risk of life and liberty. Thus a spiritual disposition is engendered in Faust, which is far from the one which Mephistopheles desired to produce, in fact a state of soul that must needs help a man, in whom all good has not died out, to regain "the right road," from which he has strayed. Mephistopheles has again failed. Faust comes out of this awful experience heavily laden with guilt, but unquestionably a better man than when he first saw Gretchen.

Here ends the First Part, and even from this brief outline it must be apparent that the drama could not possibly end here, where most readers drop it. We are in the midst of a conflict, not at its end. If it were the real ending, only one of two issues is possible. Either Faust has won. But this, despite all of his repentance, is not to be thought of

while he is still in the very midst of the awful consequences of his wrongdoings. Or Mephistopheles has won. Then "the Lord" has lost, and the spirit of the drama would be a pessimism too terrible to think out to its last consequences. It needs no proof that Goethe, the serene optimist, could never have considered such a solution. As a matter of fact, the division between Parts I. and II. is merely accidental and outward, not essential or organic. Only the second act of the vast five-act drama has closed; the third act begins with the Second Part.

In tracing the hero's career through the Second Part, I shall endeavor to give a brief running account of the principal events themselves, for I cannot presuppose for it the same general acquaintance with the story of the plot as everybody possesses for the First Part. On the other hand, the Second Part, about twice as long as the first, teems with such a mass of detail that only the most significant elements can be referred to.

In the opening scene we find Ariel and his elfs ministering to Faust, who lies in unconscious sleep; in other words, the good and gentle influences of life gradually heal Faust's broken spirit. Then the third great episode of the drama begins. Faust is introduced to the emperor's court. In various scenes we find him engaged in a life of busy activity. He is no longer solely seeking selfish enjoyment. He is exerting himself. But there is a lack of purpose and conviction in all of his doing. According to a distinction dear to Goethe, Faust appears now *geschäftig*, and not *thätig*—i. e., busy but not truly active. He resembles a man who delights in using his powers and testing his strength, but who is not sufficiently clarified in his purposes to devote his energies to the service of high and worthy ideals. In fact, Faust still allows Mephistopheles to conduct matters pretty much as he pleases, and Mephistopheles sees to it that the activities in which they engage shall ultimately result in harm, or, at least, be of no value.

The scenes of court life, relating to government and to pleasure, are varied and full of life, but only one fact is of spe-

cial significance for the further development of the plot. The emperor has heard of, and during some carnival festivities has himself experienced, Faust's magic skill. As a supreme test he therefore asks that Faust conjure up, for the court's entertainment, the shades of Paris and of Helen. Mephistopheles, when asked by Faust for assistance, must admit that, as the devil of northern cloudlands, he possesses no power over the sunny forms of southern climes. The beautiful cannot be the sphere of the spirit of evil and meanness, for Goethe firmly believed in the ennobling and uplifting influences of the beautiful. Thus Faust is forced to act for himself, independently, and he undertakes the enterprise, even though at the risk of losing his life in it.

Here, I believe, lies the turning point in the drama considered as a whole. So far Mephistopheles has suggested what has been undertaken; this time the suggestion comes from a neutral source, the emperor; henceforth it will be Faust himself who will set up his own goal for his activity. Thus far Mephistopheles has accomplished everything, inviting Faust merely to passive enjoyment; this time, however, Faust acts without Mephistopheles; soon we shall see Mephistopheles forced to employ his energies in pursuance of Faust's self-chosen aims.

Paris and Helen appear as shades, and are admired and criticised by the court in a soulless manner. Only Faust is really struck with the sublimity of Helen's beauty, so much, in fact, that during the next, the fourth, episode the effort to win her becomes the controlling influence of his life—*i. e.*, he enters the sign of the æsthetic ideal. For his search for Helen, and his final wooing and wedding of her, we must not interpret as a return to the sphere of sexual love, as portrayed in the Gretchen tragedy. Helen, in our drama, is not so much the ideally beautiful Grecian, as rather the Grecian ideal of beauty in art and life, and thus, in a measure, an incarnation of some of the highest human achievements of the past. In search of it and in communion with it, Faust is therefore actuated by a truly lofty and noble aim in life, although not yet by the loftiest and noblest.

Two of the most famous and, in many respects, most beautiful portions of the Second Part are devoted to the portrayal of the sphere into which we have now entered—namely, the so-called classical Walpurgis Night, and the Helena drama proper.

The classical Walpurgis Night has been developed as an elaborate Grecian counterpart of the mythical Walpurgis Night festival on top of the Brocken mountain, as it is portrayed in the First Part. The invention as a whole, is Goethe's, while the various elements of it have been freely taken from old Grecian fables and myths. The understanding and appreciation of the whole requires a fairly extensive familiarity with even minor and remote details of Grecian folklore so that for most readers an intelligent study of at least this portion of the Second Part is impossible without a running commentary. The scene has been developed to its present proportions largely for its own sake and interest, but its organic relation to what precedes and follows is distinct. Faust, haunted by the picture of Helen, is bent upon finding means for winning her back from Hades, and information as to the most efficacious mode of procedure might be gathered at this annual spirit-reunion on the plain of Pharsalus, in Thessaly. For here, where in 48 B.C. the famous battle between Cæsar and Pompey was fought, the memory of this epoch-making event is renewed annually (so Goethe will have us believe) by a gathering of spirits in the neighborhood of the battlefield during the night following the anniversary of the battle. It certainly is a superstition of the folklore of many peoples that great and decisive battles, as, *e. g.*, the battle of Marathon between the Athenians and Persians, and the battle of the Romans and Germans against the Huns on the Catalaunian Plain, were each year fought over and over again by spirits in the air. Since thus on the Pharsalian battlefield all of the principal characters of Greek legend are going to assemble, Faust hopes to be able to find among them some news of Helen. And, indeed, after a series of inquiries and varied adventures, the famous sorceress, Manto, ultimately shows Faust the entrance

to the lower world beneath Mount Olympus, where he is to plead with Persephone for Helen's return to the upper regions. A noble scene, which was to depict Faust's experience in Hades, and thus was to form the connecting link between the classical Walpurgis Night and the Helena drama proper, the poet unfortunately never wrote. At any rate, Faust's suit must be supposed to have been successful, for in the third act Helen appears in the world of man.

The scene shifts to Sparta, to a place in front of the palace of Menelaus. Helen herself, surrounded by her retinue of Spartan women, imagines that she is just returning home from Troy, sent ahead by her husband to make all necessary preparations for an elaborate sacrifice. Mephistopheles appears, disguised in the ugly shape of one of the Graiae or Phorcyads, the three sisters dwelling in utter darkness and possessing only one eye and one tooth in common, who to the Greek imagination were the acme of everything horrible and repulsive. This form he, the lover of everything ugly, has borrowed from the Phorcyads during the classical Walpurgis Night, while his victim, Faust, hardly his victim any longer, has been in search of the sublime beauty of Helen. Mephistopheles pretends to be an old stewardess at Menelaus's palace, and tells Helen that she herself is to be the victim to be slain at the sacrifice, for which her enraged husband has ordered her to prepare. But he promises her easy delivery from certain death if she will but place herself under the protection of his master, who, during Menelaus's absence, has acquired power and land in the mountain districts to the north. Helen, thoroughly frightened, gives her consent, and, by magic, she is transported to Faust's stronghold, which is represented as a Gothic castle of the Middle Ages. Faust greets her with profound respect and admiration, offers his protection, and wins her love. The offspring of this union of Faust and Helen is a supernatural child, Euphorion, who, driven by his ethereal nature, tries by all means to rise above the level of his surroundings, climbing and flying upwards, but suddenly falling dead at his parents' feet. In the figure of Euphorion Goethe offered a delicate

tribute to the memory of Lord Byron, whose premature death at Missolonghi had occurred but shortly before the time when the *Helena* drama was elaborated, and whose poetic genius Goethe greatly admired. Euphorion, dying, entreats Helen not to leave him alone in the realm of darkness. She, irresistibly drawn on by her son's prayer, vanishes, leaving Faust again alone.

This time Faust has enjoyed true happiness, the recollection of which is free from the sting of remorse. But even it, being only temporary, did not furnish a lasting and never-failing source of satisfaction.

But before we, like Faust, leave the sphere of the æsthetic ideal, I should like to call attention to one more feature of this portion of the drama, which evidently is symbolic and largely even allegorical in its nature, and severely taxes the imagination of even the most willing and best-prepared reader.

Aside from the personal compliment to Byron, the figure of Euphorion, more broadly interpreted, would seem to represent modern romanticism in general. As Euphorion is the offspring of the Helen of the ancients and of Faust, who, in these scenes, appears as one of those baronial knights of the Middle Ages, who actually established themselves in various parts of Greece in connection with the fourth crusade of 1202, so was modern romanticism, in some measure, the result of a fusion of the spirit of ancient and Renaissance art with the spirit of the romantic literature of the Middle Ages. Thus understood, the poet's plan seems to have been to place before us a kaleidoscopic vision of the whole development of the art and culture of the past, from the days of the glory of Greek art down to the poet's own time.

Such a plan is probably too bold and vast for artistic treatment, especially for treatment in dramatic form. To admit, therefore, that from an artistic standpoint, Goethe's treatment of it is hardly quite satisfactory is no serious reproach on his poetic genius. Like Faust himself, he seems to have attempted the impossible. But the attempt itself should not be ascribed to a wanton desire of doing something perhaps

never attempted before; for it is a necessary and logical part of the whole plan. If Faust is to exhaust all the experiences of man, the question had to be answered whether there was not, perhaps, something in the achievements of the past that could have granted the longed-for satisfaction. The poet's answer to this quest is a negative one. The past, no matter how beautiful, cannot be the fulfillment of the needs and desires of the present. It can and should furnish stimulants and materials toward the mastery of the problems of the present, but it cannot itself offer their solution.

And so we follow Faust to the last sphere of his experience. Carried back from Greece to Germany on their magic cloak, Faust and Mephistopheles pass over plains, rivers, and seas. When Mephistopheles asks whether, in all they have seen, there was nothing that evoked in Faust the desire to devote his energies to it, the latter, remembering the sight of the waves of the sea lashing a waste and desolate shore, exclaims:

FAUST.

The sea sweeps on, in thousand quarters flowing,
Itself unfruitful, barrenness bestowing;
It breaks and swells, and rolls, and overwhelms
The desert stretch of desolated realms.
There endless waves hold sway, in strength erected
And then withdrawn—and nothing is effected.
If aught could drive me to despair, 'twere, truly,
The aimless force of elements unruly.
Then dared my mind its dreams to over-soar:
Here would I fight—subdue this fierce uproar!
And possible 'tis!—Howe'er the tides may fill,
They gently foam around the steadfast hill;
A moderate height resists and drives asunder,
A moderate depth allures and leads them on,
So, swiftly, plans within my mind were drawn:
Let that high joy be mine for evermore,
To shut the lordly Ocean from the shore,
The watery waste to limit and to bar,
And push it back upon itself afar!
From step to step I settled how to fight it:
Such is my wish: dare thou to expedite it!

Mephistopheles is willing, for the terms of the pact demand that he should be. As a reward for valuable assistance which they render the emperor in his war against a powerful rival, Faust receives the desolate and undesirable seashore as a fief. Here he spends the rest of his life, building dikes, digging canals, constructing harbors, sending out his ships over all the seas. Constantly he fights against the renewed encroachments of the water, and thereby turns a useless, uninhabited stretch of land into a cultivated district, a fit abode for free and labor-loving men to live and prosper in. He has at last discovered the blessing that dwells in strenuous exertion and unceasing labor, provided it be prompted by noble motives and directed toward worthy ends. He no longer labors for himself alone; he works for the benefit of others, and therein seeks and finds his own joy and prosperity. He creates values where before him there were none; he carries the stir of human labor and the voices of human joy and human sorrow into places filled before by the monotonous roar of the unfeeling elements. The over-exalted dreamer and reckless and regardless egoist has changed at last into a culture hero, who has experienced the saving grace of strenuous devotion to duty in the service of mankind.

Finally, in this unceasing but serene activity in the interests of human culture and progress, in his watchful care not only for the welfare of his fellow-men, but even of coming generations, Faust seems to have found that continued peace of soul for which he has been yearning so long, and which nothing else had been able to furnish him. It is true, he is blind, bowed down by care and extreme old age; but he is none the less eagerly bent on performing the duties of each day. Thus he much reminds us of the poet himself, who penned the last lines of the drama as an octogenarian, and was not willing to pause or rest until this supreme work of his life should be completed.

In this spirit Faust exclaims:

Yea, to this thought I cling, with virtue rife,
Wisdom's last fruit, profoundly true:

Freedom alone he earns as well as life,
Who day by day must conquer them anew.

His ideal striving has not left him to the last. For even now it is not so much the pleasure at what he has already achieved, as rather the anticipation of what he still hopes to accomplish in the future, that makes him say:

Then to the moment might I say :
Linger awhile, thou art so fair.

With such words on his lips and such thoughts in his soul, he dies, clear in his conception of his relation to the world, sure of his purpose, pure in his motives, a redeemed man.

He professes no creed, but his convictions are borne by the loftiest principles. But, even though in anticipation of still greater bliss in the future, he has spoken the fatal word to the fleeting moment: "Linger awhile, thou art so fair." So, technically, mechanically, Mephistopheles might claim, and does claim, to have won his wager. But the angelic hosts that come to carry Faust's soul into eternity convince him, despite his impotent rage, that he is deceived. Nothing that *he* has given Faust causes the latter to speak the important words. Faust has won the wager. He is saved.

In the last act of the drama one more point might demand some elucidation. Mephistopheles to the last remains in Faust's company, who even uses him for the consummation of his high purposes. To a mediæval mind this fact alone would even to the last condemn Faust as ensnared in sin. This, however, is far from Goethe's much profounder conception of the relation between the two. Even though Mephistopheles represents the coarser, more vulgar tendencies of human nature, he still represents energy. This force is not to be thrown aside, not to be destroyed; it is to be subdued, to be forced to do the bidding of the higher spiritual nature. That, according to Goethe, is the true solution of the conflict each man is waging. When, at the end of his career, Faust, though unintentionally, causes the death of the

good old couple, Philemon and Baucis, and the destruction of their property, I believe the poet does not only wish to emphasize the fact that the individual must not stand in the way of the common progress and benefit, but rather to show that the subjugation of our lower impulses is never completely accomplished. Even with the wisest and best of men their coarser instincts will occasionally escape the control of their higher nature. Again, it is not the individual act that condemns or saves, but rather the spirit from which the deed flows, that adds to our credit or guilt. Of this the chorus of angels assure us as they carry Faust's immortal part aloft:

The noble spirit now is free,
And saved from evil scheming :
Whoe'er aspires unweariedly
Is not beyond redeeming.

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